



# *The Insider*

[www.senate.mi.gov/switalski](http://www.senate.mi.gov/switalski)

## **Inside State Politics with State Senator Mickey Switalski Senate District 10**

**March 3 , 2006**

Welcome to the electronic version of *The Insider*. I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your support and giving me an opportunity to represent you in the Michigan Senate. It is my sincere hope that this bi-weekly e-newsletter will keep you informed of the happenings in Lansing while staying true to the traditional style of *The Insider*. If you would like to contact me, please feel free to e-mail me at [senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov](mailto:senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov) or call me at my Roseville or Lansing office. You can also meet me in person during my constituent hours, coming to a library near you. Call my office and make an appointment or just walk in. See schedule for details.

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### **Mickey's Blog: My Academic Journey: Confessions of a Professional Student**

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My father always stressed to me the importance of getting a good education. He incessantly preached the importance of education to me and my six brothers and sisters. We listened, but as children sometimes do, we listened too well.

My parents valued education enough to pay to send us to Catholic School, but after my sophomore year in high school at Sacred Heart in Roseville, the school closed. I did my last two years at Roseville High, met an entirely new group of people, and made a lot of new friends. I hated that my school closed, but I felt lucky that I got to see two different systems, the public and private schools. I saw how they were different, and that there wasn't just one way to do things in life. I also had to learn how to get along with very different kinds of people. Nowadays, this is called diversity. For me, it was a very good experience because it opened a new world to me.

When I finished high school, I wanted to go away to college. My parents, with 7 kids, didn't have enough money to send me to college, but my Dad gave me a job making tombstones in his shop in Detroit, the Sheldon Granite Company.

I saved my money and went away to Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. My older brother Mark had gone there for a couple of years, when Pistol Pete Maravich was scoring 44 a game, so I knew a few people through him, and tuition was dirt cheap. Even with out-of-state tuition, it was cheaper than Michigan. Plus, Louisiana is a great state. It is part of a distinctive part of the country, the Old South, and yet it is unique, with New Orleans, the jazz and Cajuns and Creoles and the French influence. And it was warm down there. So I figured it would be a great adventure.

LSU became something of a family tradition among the Switalskis. My younger sister Monica ended up going there after I left, and now my 12-year old son, Liam, has informed me that he intends to go there.

I felt an urge to go somewhere completely new and alien, where no one knew me, and completely remake myself. Having a big nurturing family is great, but it can be confining, and I wanted to be liberated from all my past influences and go off in a new direction. I was determined to go there and study hard.

Baton Rouge lived up to my high expectations. I lived in the football stadium, where the irrepressible Kingfish, Huey P. Long, had built dormitories under the seats. I was poor and lived on one Big Mac a day when the cafeteria was closed. I pedaled a raggedy bicycle to the Mississippi levee and read there in the afternoon sun. I worked in the Plantation Room restaurant of the student union, and learned to love gumbo and red beans and rice and corn muffins. I saved my pennies, walked to the bookstore and bought a philosophy book like Descartes or Plato or Burke and spend the day in bed reading it, until the stadium throbbed in anticipation of Tiger football that evening.

After a year of hard work, I won a President's scholarship from the University, which simply gave me in-state tuition. But that was huge, because tuition was only \$167 a semester, no matter how many hours you took. Ever mindful of a bargain, I would load up with the max of 19 or 20 hours, and I got into the honors program, which was the best educational experience I ever had. The Honors Program was team taught by top faculty and had about 50 students, with 3 hours of lecture and 3 hours of seminars, reading the Great Books of Western Civilization.

I switched my major from History to something really arcane, Classical Languages, the study of ancient Latin and Greek. I got my Bachelors degree in that, and won a full scholarship to Duke University's Ph.D program in Classics.

After a year at Duke, I made an important decision. Job prospects were not good for Classics graduates. The Ph.D grads ahead of me were waiting on tables. And during my last two years at LSU, I had become increasingly interested, even obsessed, with politics. I was working hard at a career with slim opportunities, in a field that was epitome of the ivory tower. I felt like I wanted to mix it up in this world, the rough and tumble of current affairs, and not lock myself away to contemplate the eternal verities.

I walked away from Duke and my scholarship after one year and turned up at LSU the next fall. I applied to the History Graduate School, interviewed with the Department Chair and won an assistantship on the spot. It was just enough to live on and pay my tuition, and I found a great place on Park Boulevard with two Louisiana buddies. I also got a chance to work offshore on an oil rig, an incredible experience, and got a job as a stringer covering high school basketball for the *St. Tammany Farmer*. These were some of the most enjoyable years of my life.

I met my future wife, Roma, during this time. She was a foreign student from Glasgow, Scotland, working in the Louisiana State Archives for the summer while doing research for her Ph.D in History from the University of Pennsylvania, where she was on full scholarship.

My father monitored my progress with discomfort. I was getting an education, but maybe a little bit too much education. He would frequently ask my brother Mark, who was in law school, "When are you going to be done with school and start putting some money in the kitty?" Mark, who is a judge now, would patiently say how much was left of his 3 years in law school. It wouldn't be long before my dad would ask him the same question again. All us kids would just laugh.

With me, my dad would say, "Mickey, you've got to get a program." His point was that there had to be a purpose to an education. It shouldn't be an end in itself, especially if that meant not contributing to the kitty.

But I went on my merry way.

I was 26 when I finished my Masters in History from LSU, and it was time to make a decision. I had a job offer at the *St. Tammany Farmer*, as editor of the one-person newspaper. Louisiana would be a great place to live. Life was slower down there, and as a Yankee, I seemed to move at a faster pace than the locals. So just by being normal I figured I could get ahead. I'd secretly wanted to be a farmer since raising chickens as a kid, and maybe this was my chance.

But at Roma's urging, I applied to a graduate program in Politics at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. I was very interested in Foreign Policy and it was one of five programs in the world recommended in a newsletter I subscribed to. She was heading back to Scotland and it seemed like fate might play a hand in our lives.

Imagine my delight when I won a full scholarship to Aberdeen and fulfilled a boyhood dream of going to school in Europe. I was accepted into the Masters of Letters program in Politics, and the stipend gave me free tuition and enough money to live on for the yearlong program. Goodbye, St. Tammany Parish and hello, Scotland!

I flew from New Orleans to Atlanta to London, and took the train 8 hours to Glasgow, where Roma lived. I still remember coming through the clouds to see the bright patchwork of fields and hedgerows and stone dykes of Britain, and struggling through a misty Victoria Station carrying a backpack, two big suitcases and a typewriter.

My educational experience was most profound in Aberdeen. I booked it in Louisiana, and I enjoyed the culture. But nothing bears immersion in a foreign country for opening your eyes to the world around you, making you appreciate what we have in this country, and making you question basic assumptions about the way things are or have to be.

The courses were great, the medieval setting was beautiful, and the people and their speech were fascinating and the creature comforts were backwards. This was more than education of the mind. It was a new experience for the whole body.

Halfway through the year, just as I began a planned excursion into the British countryside with Roma, I got a call. My father had died suddenly of a heart attack. I returned home the next day on the longest flight of my life, silently weeping most of the journey.

There was some discussion of my remaining, but I wanted to finish and I returned for the Spring Term. But a chapter was closing in my life. Death has a way of refocusing your attention on the relentless passage of time and makes you assess your place in the world. I was 27 now. My friends were married, with kids and making their careers.

I made the most of my time. I studied hard, but I also took up golf on the ancient Kings Links across from the College, where golf has been played for 500 years. I drank lots of Guinness. I passed my exams and my professor hired me to do research on a study of prospects for defense specialization within NATO. I did that instead of working on my dissertation, and then spent the money I earned on a trip to Italy with Roma.

I returned home, at the height of the 1982 recession, the worst economic time in Michigan I have ever seen. There were no jobs to be had. I eventually cobbled together 5 different part-time jobs, all at the same time, to manage a semi-living wage. I saved my pennies living at home with my mother and little brother Matt.

I worked half-heartedly on my dissertation, but never finished it. My Scottish Professor, a great thinker and excellent writer named David Greenwood, called with an offer of an assistantship at Cornell in Ithaca, New York. A prof from LSU called offering a job on a congressional campaign.

But I rejected both. I was determined to build my part-time jobs into a real job here near my family. My life as an itinerant student was over. Like many people, in the years ahead I took the odd course at Wayne State and U of M Dearborn, to help me with my real job. But my long and pleasant run as a professional student was over.

Within 3 years, I was gainfully employed by General Dynamics and married Roma, luring her away from her beloved Scotland. We've been married 21 years now.

Now *that* has been a *real* education.

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## Mickey's TV Insider Show

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Check out my TV Insider Show coming to a television station near you. Watch me interview local guests about politics, life, issues and concerns to our district.

### **Sterling Heights**

Every Saturday and Sunday at 12:30 p.m.  
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

### **Utica**

Every Wednesday at 9 a.m.  
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

### **Clinton Township**

Last week of every month- Sat thru Thurs  
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

### **Roseville**

Various Times  
(Comcast Channel 18)

\*Please note that Sterling Heights/Utica/Clinton Township will show the TV Insider Show on Comcast Channel 5 and Wide Open West Channel 10. Clinton Township will air the TV Insider Show at various times during the last week of every month. Roseville can see the TV Insider Show on Comcast Channel 18.

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## Coffee Hours

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\*Please note that since the District Office is in Roseville, I do not have set coffee hours in Roseville. However, I encourage you to visit the Roseville office. We even have a coffee pot. Everyone is welcome to attend the coffee hours and discuss their issues and concerns.

**March 6**  
**7-9 p.m.**

Location: Sterling Heights Public Library  
(40255 Dodge Park)  
Sterling Heights

**March 27**  
**7-9 p.m.**

Location: Clinton-Macomb Public Library  
(40900 Romeo Plank)  
Clinton Township

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## Contact My Office

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